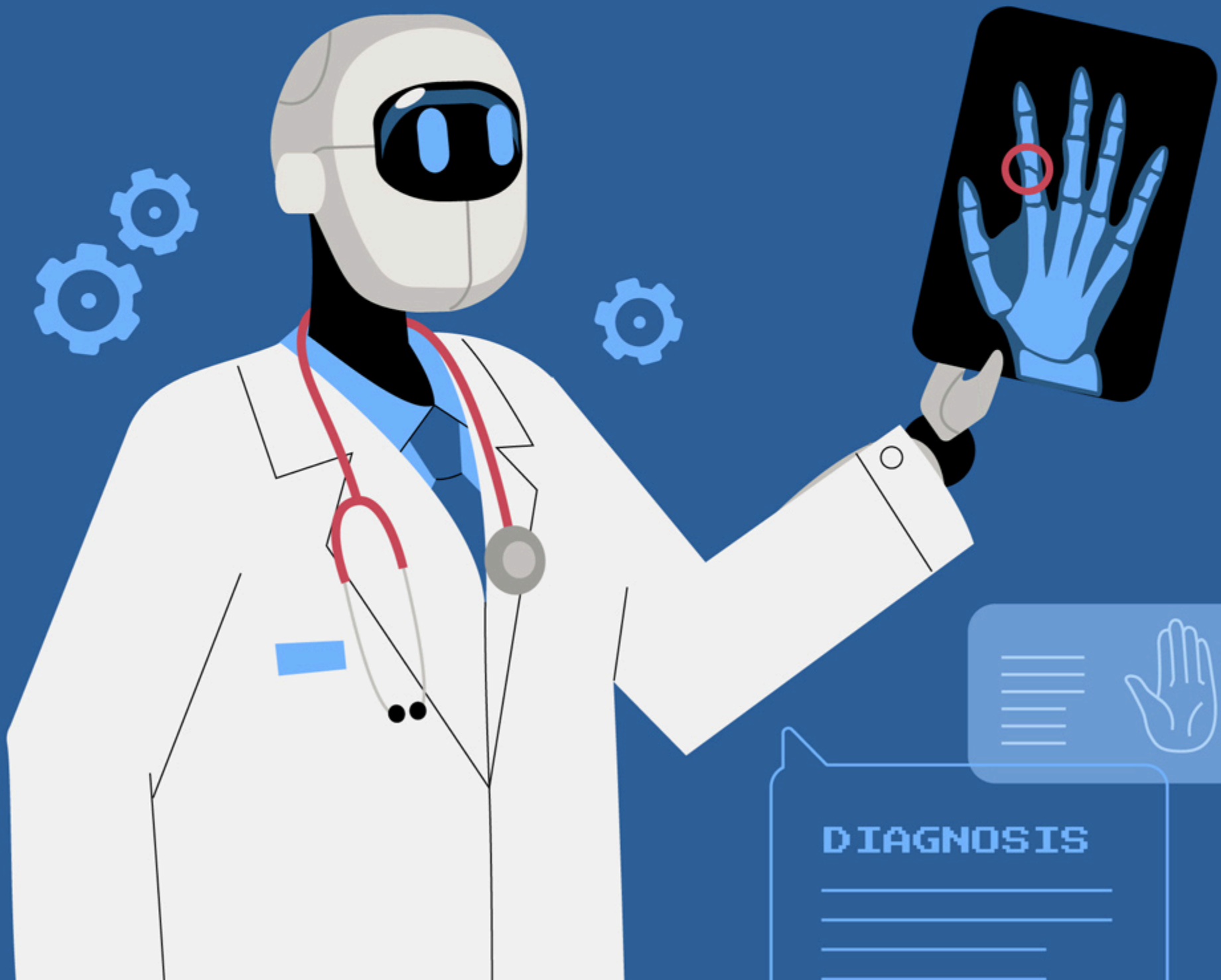
DUALE, OVIA & ALEX-ADEDIPE

Pillars of Nigeria's Draft National Artificial Intelligence Strategy

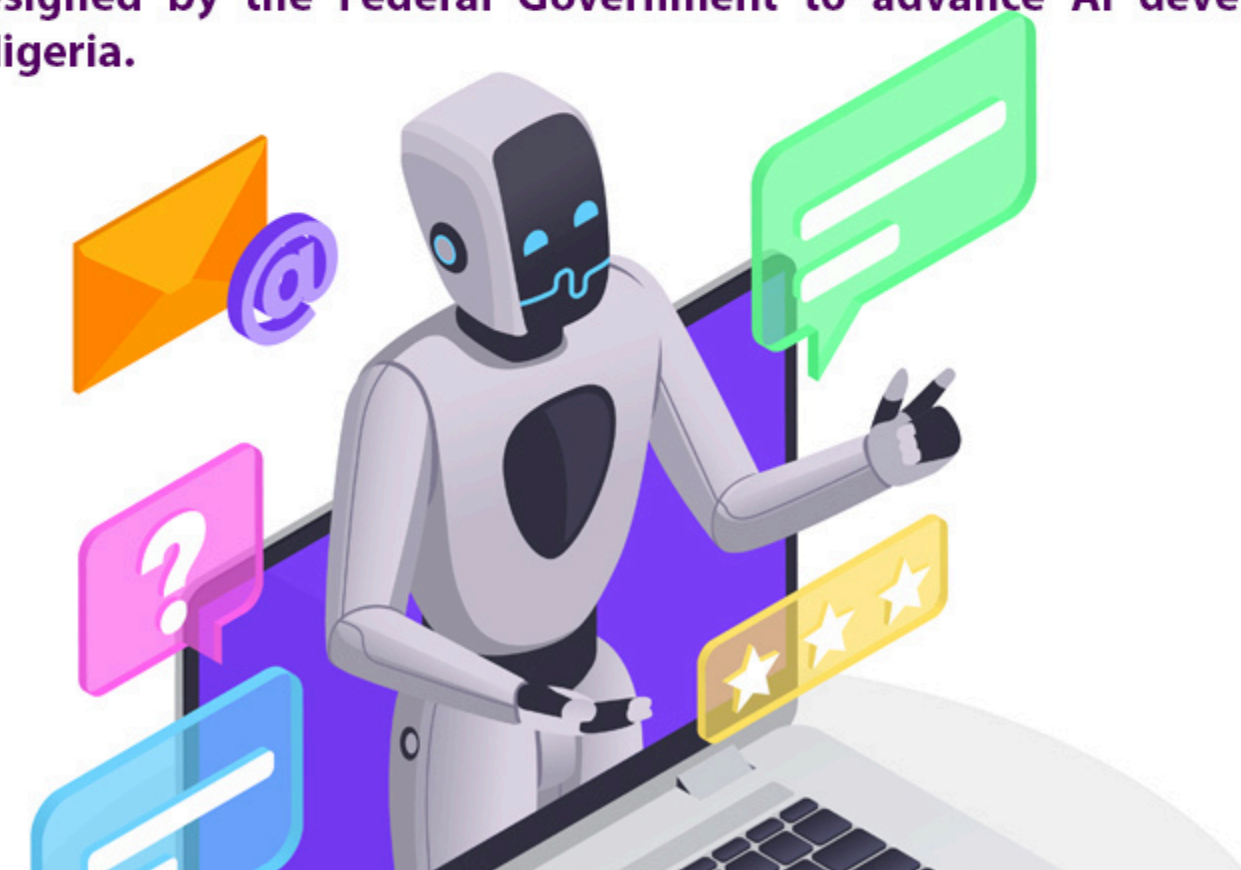


Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (**AI**) represents one of humanity's greatest technological advancements and has experienced widespread global adoption since its inception. From smart assistants like Alexa, Cortana, Siri, and Google Assistant to marketing chatbots and the recent introduction of ChatGPT. In recent years, Nigeria has shown a growing interest and commitment to AI, evident in the government's investments in AI research and development aimed at driving innovation, productivity, and job creation. Initiatives such as the National Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics (**NCAIR**), the Nigeria Artificial Intelligence Research Scheme (**NAIRS**), and the 3 Million Technical Talent (**3MTT**) Program highlight the Federal Government's dedication to the growth of AI.

In August 2024, the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation, and Digital Economy released the draft of Nigeria's first National Artificial Intelligence Strategy (NAIS) which was formulated by the NCAIR and the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) with support from private organizations.

In today's #TMTThursday series, we analyze the strategic objectives and actionable initiatives designed by the Federal Government to advance AI development and adoption in Nigeria.

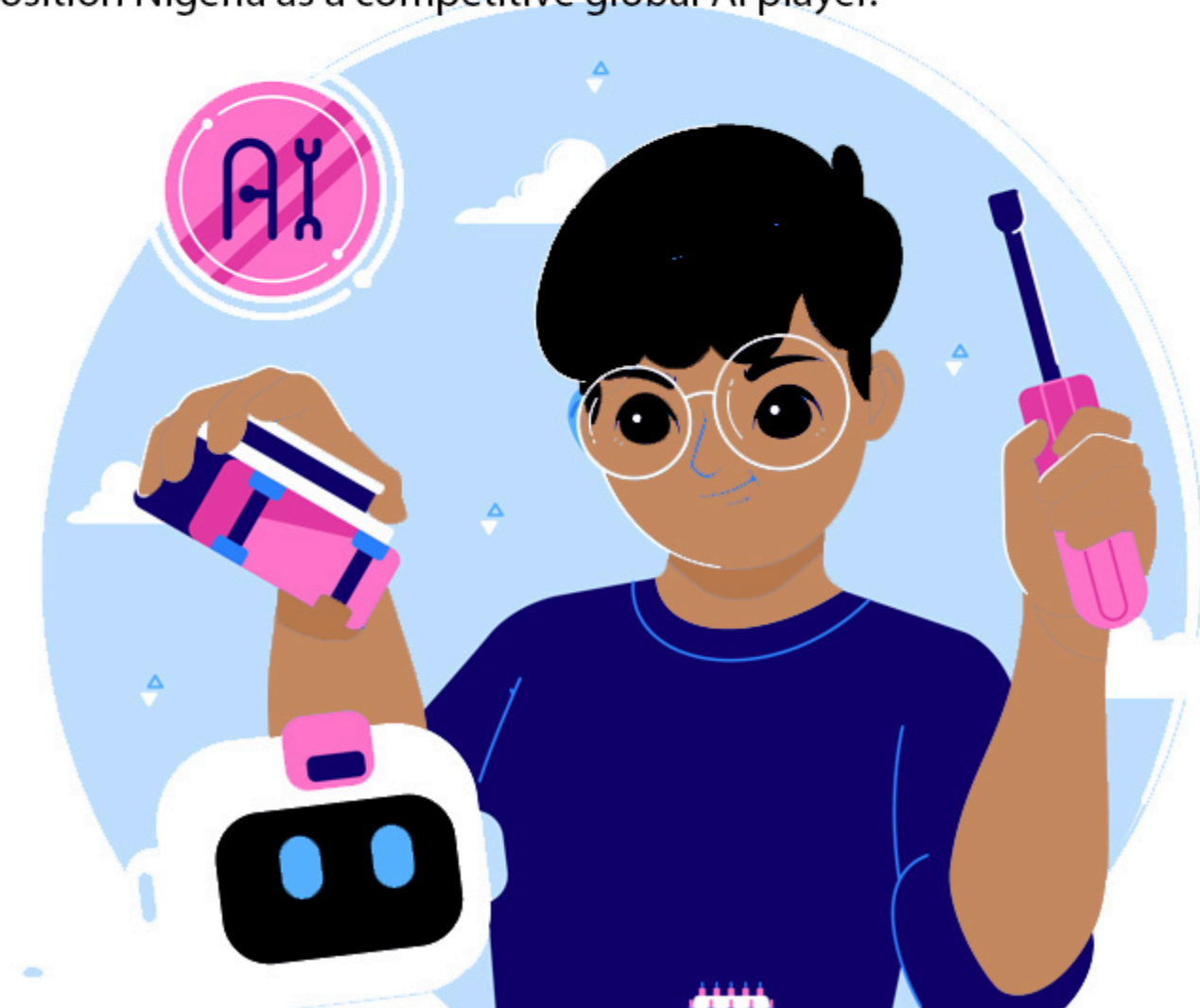


The Strategic Pillars of the NAIS

The Federal Government envisions leading the global charge in harnessing AI's transformative power through responsible, ethical, and inclusive innovation, while promoting sustainable development via collaborative efforts. To realize this vision, the government has outlined five strategic pillars in the NAIS which are discussed below.

a. Building Foundational AI Infrastructure

Nigeria aims to become a leader in AI by establishing a robust infrastructure and enhancing computing capabilities. This involves investing in AI-specific hardware and software, with a focus on domestic solutions to lessen dependence on foreign technology. The NAIS emphasizes creating AI clusters powered by clean energy and providing tax incentives to stimulate private sector investment in critical infrastructure to boost innovation, generate employment, and position Nigeria as a competitive global AI player.

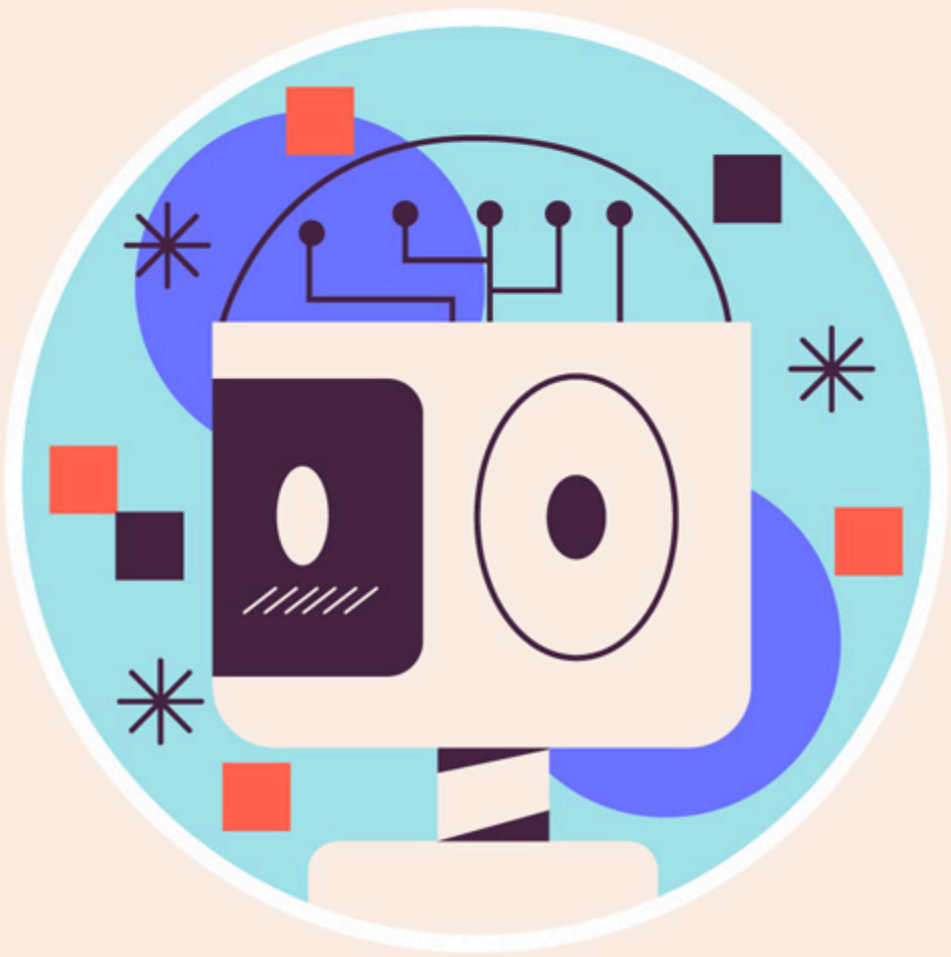


b. Building and Sustaining a World-Class AI Ecosystem

This pillar focuses on fostering sustainable AI partnerships, encouraging international collaborations, and nurturing a culture of innovation. Key initiatives include the Sustainable Applied AI Partnership Platform (SAAPP), which will unite diverse stakeholders for AI development and the AI Synergy Alliance.

c. Accelerating AI Adoption and Sector Transformation

This pillar targets leveraging AI for substantial real-world impact by promoting widespread adoption across various sectors, transforming industries, and stimulating economic growth. It emphasizes locally driven AI innovations, data-informed decision-making, and preparing an AI-ready workforce. Strategies include launching sector-specific AI adoption roadmaps, adhering to global data quality standards, and creating a National AI Research and Development Fund for advanced research.

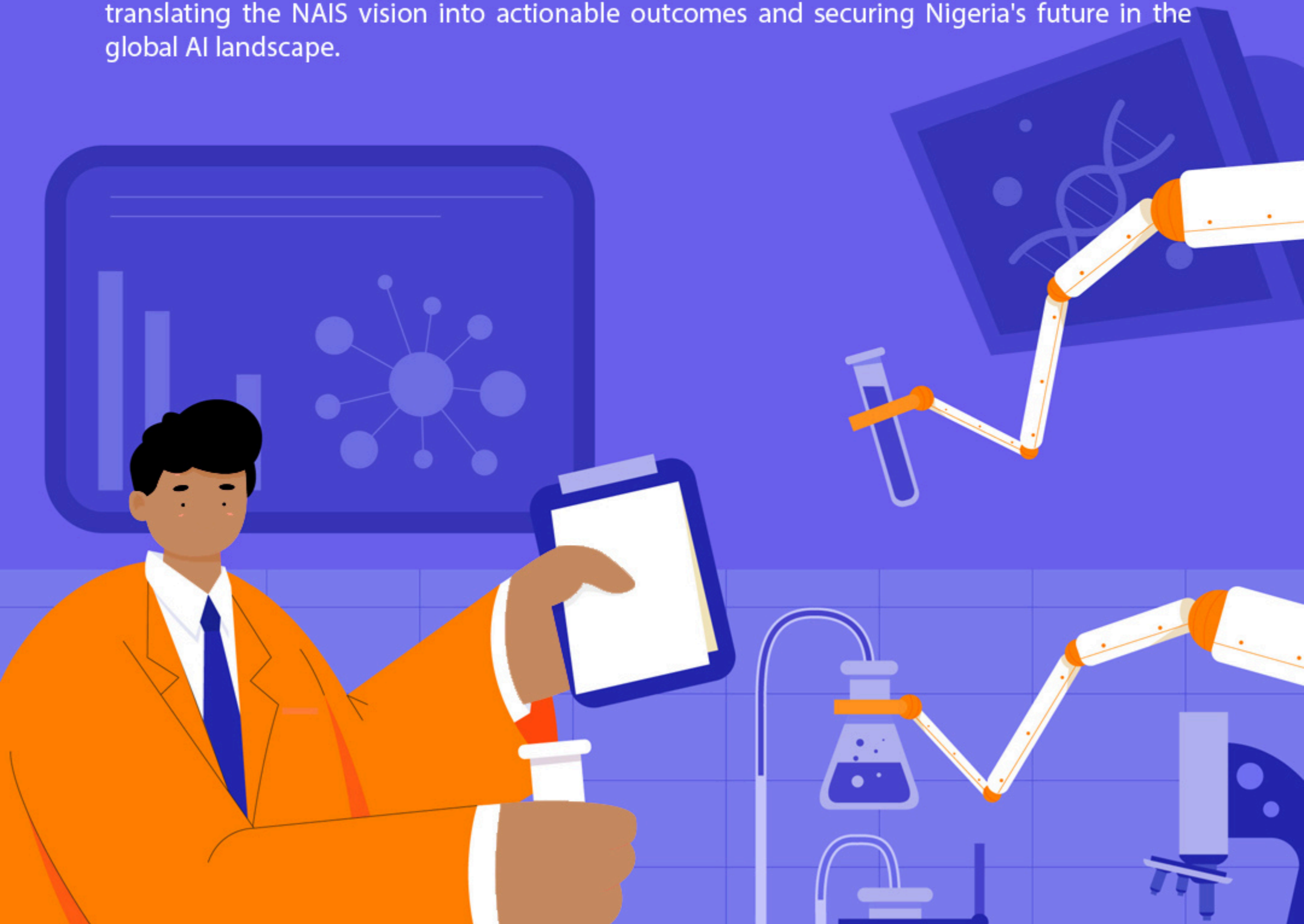


d. Ensuring Responsible and Ethical AI Development

Ensuring responsible AI development is a key focus of this pillar. It involves establishing a comprehensive AI ethics framework, including creating an AI Ethics Expert Group (AIEEG) to guide the ethical development of AI in line with Nigerian values. The framework will address fairness, transparency, accountability, privacy, and human well-being. Another critical aspect is managing the human impact of AI, such as job displacement and inequality, through foresight studies, legislative reforms, and digital literacy programs.

e. Developing a Robust AI Governance Framework

This pillar underscores the importance of clear governance principles for the effective development of AI in Nigeria. It aims to develop National AI principles to guide AI development and usage, aligning with core values and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The pillar includes forming an independent AI governance regulatory body to enforce ethical standards, provide guidance, and resolve disputes. It also involves creating a National AI policy framework for governance and a National AI risk management framework to identify and mitigate risks associated with AI systems.

Conclusion

The draft NAIS outlines a forward-thinking approach to positioning the country as a global leader in AI. By focusing on these five strategic pillars, the NAIS aims to drive innovation and sustainable growth. While the strategy is comprehensive, it currently lacks specific implementation details and funding sources. Addressing these gaps will be crucial for translating the NAIS vision into actionable outcomes and securing Nigeria's future in the global AI landscape.